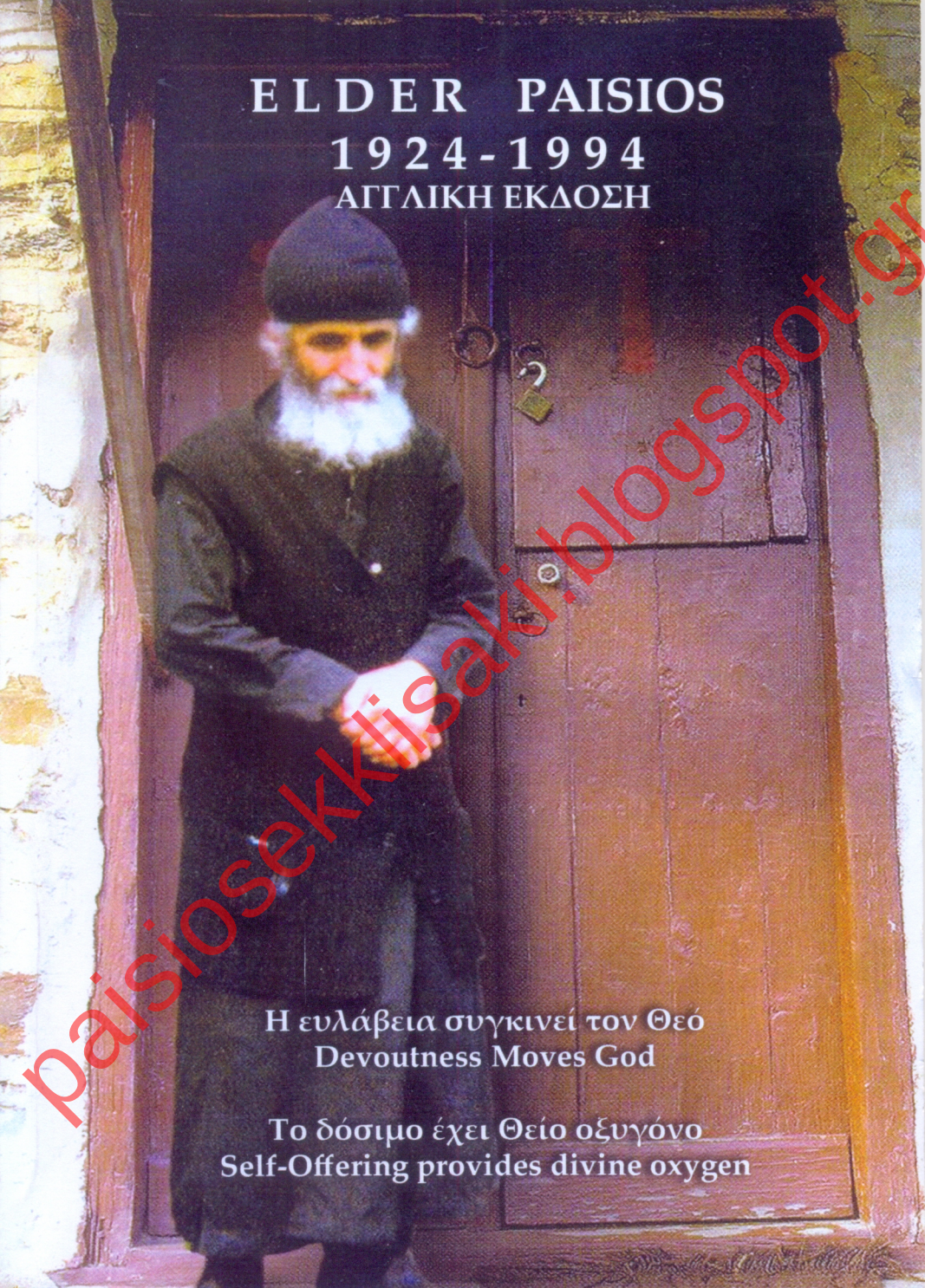
ELDER PAISIOS
1924-1994
ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ



Η ευλάβεια συγκινεί τον Θεό
Devoutness Moves God

Το δόσιμο έχει Θείο οξυγόνο
Self-Offering provides divine oxygen

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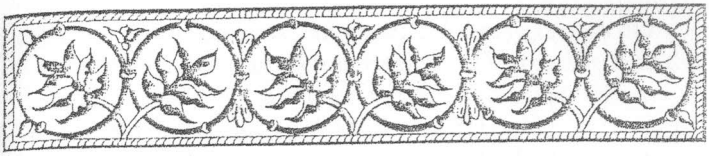
ΤΠΚΑ



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CHAPTER FOUR

Η ευλάβεια συγκινεί τον Θεό

Devoutness Moves God

CHAPTER FIVE

Το δόσιμο έχει θείο οξυγόνο

Self-Offering Provides Divine Oxygen

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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAISIOS

Paisios used to be one of the most enlightened Saint figures in our Church, the last decades. He was born in Pharasa of Cappadocia, in the middle east, on 25 July in 1924 and was baptized and named after Arsenios. His Parents, Prodromos and Evlampia Eznepide, were very devout and had ten children while Arsenios had nine siblings. Arsenios even from his infancy, received the blessing from God to be baptized by a Saint who lived in his area, the Saint Arsenios from Cappadocia. Saint Arsenios predicted the future holiness of the child, he asked his Godmother to name after him Arsenios, telling her distinctively that he wanted a monk to be in his stead, namely to have his name. Almost a month after Arsenios' baptism his family followed the road to Greece where he finally stayed in Konitsa. Arsenios since he was a child had a huge love for Christ and our Virgin Mary and he had a strong desire to be a monk. He loved going to the forest holding a wooden cross, he used to pray. At the age of 21 he joined the army, where he excelled in moral and courage. He always asked to go to the front line and to the most dangerous positions, he wished his own death instead of someone's else death. Many times he run the risk of being killed in order to save somebody else, a comrade-in-arms. When he did his military service he went to the Holy Mountain to become a monk. In 1954 he took monastic vows and was named after Averkios, and later on Paisios. He was a monk in the Monastery Esphigmenou and later on in the Monastery Philotheou. As a monk he had an exemplary obedience while he was trying to help the other monks whenever and however he could. From 1958 to 1964 Father Paisios is not in the Holy Mountain, initially in the area of konitsa where he will support thousands of souls and he will help them to escape from the fallacy of the heretic, while later he goes to the isolated and rough Sina, to Saints' Galactionos and Epistimis. In 1964 he returns to the Holy Mountain. His Elder Father Tihonas, many times during Divine service he saw as he himself confessed, the Herouvim and Seraphеim to glorify God. The Elder lived for a short time in the skete of Iviron and Katounakia. After the death of his Elder in 1968 he succeeded him in the cell of The Holy Cross. In conclusion, in 1979 he settled down in the Koutloumousiano cell <<Panagouda>>. Little by little his Holy Figure begins to become known to most pilgrims. The whole day, from east til west, he give advices, consoles, banish care, fill your soul with faith, hope and love for God, while at night he reads letters in tens which people sent them every day and prays to God, being sleepless for people who asked his help.

We heard that the Elder Porfirios (Malakasa), in his great mortification had said the following, for the Elder Paisios: f. Paisios' Grace has greater worth because he acquired it by a hard-fought struggle, while God gave it to me as a gift when I was young in order to help people in need...Saints like f. Paisios are sent to earth by God every 400 years!!!...

In the Holly mountain he led an ascetic's life and he spent there the most years of his life. The gifts that God embellished him with are many. He had the gift of healing (he cured a lot of people of a variety of illnesses, cancers, paralytics from birth and more.), he had the gift of against evil spirits (he cured many, exorcising evil spirits from people who were given a rough time) , he had the gift of prediction (he said to many people facts that will happen in the future in a personal level but he also prophesied of future events of our country to come) , he had the gift of far-sightedness (he knew someone's heart deeply and purely than the man himself, that's why he gave advices to a nicety and properly and everyone listened to the word he needed to hear), he had the gift of distinction in spirits (he knew to a nicety if a spiritual occurrence was by God or by evil that tried to deceive and mislead), he had distinction(he knew in any case which one was God's will and if he had to reveal it or not. He knew which one was good, right in any case. Even for non spiritual matters).

He had the gift of divinity. From many spiritual experiences he had with Saints, with Angels, with Virgin Mary but also with visions of the unbuilt light, in fact, he became a theologian and knew deeply the Sacraments of God.

These gifts and above all the elder's love, brought people close to him. Hundreds of people visited him in his cell every day. Endless comings and goings. The elder took the pain, the anxiety and the problems from people and gave them back a solution, joy and peace. Wherever it was worthy-he knew and God where and when-intervened miraculously, under God's rule, and solved the unsolved.

The elder Paisios was a gift by God to people. All this reputation was spread by word of mouth, by people who were surprised by his many

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kindnesses and his wonders... The Elder Paisios was brought out by God Himself.

Thousands were the letters which were sent. The Elder said:<<...or psychological problems or cancer or separated family...one of these three will be the problems...these problems give people a rough time...these kind of things they write to me>>. The Elder felt pain either in person or through letters and took it up self-sacrificed willingly... his heart went out to other people because he loved them. He didn't want and couldn't keep himself aloof when other people suffered. If it was possible he took up people's cross on his shoulder, in order to release them from their cross.

The Elder, while he was curing other people, he didn't asked God to cure him...He wanted to be patient with illnesses. << to make some spiritual money for the old age>> he said amusingly.

The Elder had many illnesses and endured them with bravery and fighting spirit. He felt contempt for pain and laughed at it!...

In 12 July 1994 The Elder Paisios consign his Holy soul peacefully and humbly to The Lord, Who loved so much and served Him since he was young. He was buried in the yard of the hermitage of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki.

After his death, The Elder Paisios continues to do wonders. We hope to become known the miraculous events that happened and continue to happen after his death, to glorify God and the faithful to gain advantage from it, but also for the mistrustful who see the words of God to be fulfilled two thousand years ago:<<Whoever believes in me won't die>> and <<Whoever believes in me, ……..>>

So, The elder as faithful servant of Christ, didn't die but lives and does wonders!
May we all have his blessings!

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CHAPTER FOUR

Η ευλάβεια συγκινεί τον Θεό

Devoutness Moves God

What Is Devoutness

Geronda, what is devoutness?

– Devoutness is the fear of God, modesty, spiritual sensitivity. A devout person may strain to make great efforts, but this straining drips honey into his heart. It does not turn his life into a martyrdom; it is an enjoyable experience. The actions of a devout person are refined and careful. He strongly feels the presence of God, the Angels, the Saints. He senses his guardian Angel nearby, watching over him. He always keeps in mind that his body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,[1] and lives a simple, pure and sanctified life. His behaviour is always well thought-out, marked by modesty and awareness of all that is sacred. For instance, he is careful not to turn his back on the holy Icons. He does not place the Sacred Scripture or any spiritual book where he sits, and so on. If he looks upon an Icon, his heart flutters and his eyes flow with tears. Even when he merely sees the name of

1. Cf. 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19.

Christ written down somewhere, he will bow reverentl and kiss it, his soul overflowing with sweetness. Eve for a small piece of newspaper thrown to the ground an bearing the name of Christ or simply "Church of the Hol Trinity", a devout person will bend down, pick it up an kiss it with reverence, feeling sadness to see it throw away like that.

– Geronda, is piety[2] one thing and devoutness another

– Piety is a perfume, while devoutness is incense. Fo me the greatest virtue is devoutness, because the devou person attracts the Grace of God, becomes a receiver o Grace, and the Grace of God remains naturally with him Consequently, divine Grace reveals the devout, and eve ryone respects and loves him, whereas the impudent ar avoided by young and old.

You women should be more devout than men. It es pecially behoves a woman to be devout, because of he nature. When men are not devout, they are simply indif ferent. But women, when they lose their devoutness, dc extreme things. Someone told me: "When I went on a pilgrimage with my wife to the Holy Land, I also went to the River Jordan to be baptised, and my wife sat on the banks of the River washing her feet! 'What are you doing?' I told her. 'You came to the River Jordan to wash your feet?' I was so upset I swore at her!" It seems that she was completely indifferent to the sacredness of the place, while the poor fellow had so much devoutness.

2. With the term piety the Elder refers to the observation of external forms of devotion, which have no inner correspondence.

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Devoutness Is Transmitted

– Geronda, how can I acquire devoutness?

– The Fathers say that to acquire devoutness one must associate with devout people and observe how they behave. When Saint Paisios the Great was asked, "How can I acquire the fear of God?" he answered, "You must associate with people who love God and have the fear of God in their heart, so that you, too, may acquire such divine fear."[3] This, of course, does not mean that you should do outwardly whatever you see others doing without feeling it within you, for this would not be true devoutness, it would be false. Anything false is abhorrent. Devoutness is the Grace of God in man. Whatever the devout person does, he does because he feels it in his heart. Of course, there is natural devoutness within us, but, if we don't cultivate it, the devil will use our forgetfulness to make us insensitive and not devout. But the behaviour of the devout awakens devoutness in us again.

– Geronda, why do the Fathers speak only of devoutness when they advise us to acquire it by associating with those who are devout? Why do they not say the same about other virtues also?

– Because devoutness is a transmittable virtue. The movements and behaviour of a devout person are transmitted like perfume, provided the recipient possesses good will and humility. And let me tell you, if one is not devout, one has nothing. A devout person can clearly recognize all things sacred as they truly are, even though he may not be educated. For example, he will not err in any-

3. See *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Abba Poemen, 65, p. 147.

thing that has to do with divine meanings. It is much like small children who do not have any negative thoughts about their father and mother, because they love and respect them, and are able to see clearly and properly what their parents are doing. How much more so in this case, where we have to do with God, Who is incomparable and perfect in all things! One who is not devout falls into errors and falsehoods regarding the doctrine of the faith. I can see what errors are made when those who are not devout write interpretations and commentaries on the sacred texts of Holy Scripture.

All spiritual things require devoutness and heart. When everything begins with devoutness, everything is sanctified. Specifically, in order to write a Service for a Saint, one must love the Saint, and have reverence and devoutness for that Saint, so that everything one writes will be heartfelt and exude authentic devoutness. When one reaches a state of divine *eros*, divine madness, the verses flow naturally from within.

– What else can help us acquire devoutness?

– Study with the mind everything that is sacred and truly digest these readings, but also make use of any opportunities afforded; this will gradually awaken devoutness in us. For instance, if I have the chance to pass by a Church to pray and I don't take it, I am deprived of Grace. But if I want to go and something prevents me then I am not deprived of Grace, because God sees my good intention. Much help in acquiring devoutness is also found in becoming familiar with the Saints of our region, our country, so that we can love them and feel a link with them. God rejoices when we love the Saints and show devotion

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to them. And if we show devotion to the Saints, our devotion to God will of course be greater!

– Geronda, what can help us to move about in Church with devout reverence?

– When you set out to go to the Church, you should say to yourself, "Where am I going? I am now entering the House of God. What do I do? I revere the holy Icons and I worship God Himself." From your monastic cell or from your assigned obedience, you go to the Church. From the Church you go to Heaven and beyond Heaven to God Himself.

– How is this done?

– The Church is the "House" of God. And our own true home is in Paradise. Here the nuns are chanting. There the Angels, the Saints... If we politely knock at the door, wipe our feet, and sit reservedly upon entering a worldly home, how are we then to behave when we enter the House of God where Christ is being sacrificed? With one drop of divine Blood He once redeemed us from sin, and now continues to heal us with kilos of His Blood and to nurture us with His all-holy Body. Therefore, when we recall all these awe-inspiring divine events, it helps us to move about in the Church devoutly. But I see in the Divine Liturgy, even when the priest says, *Let us lift up our hearts*, and we respond, *We have lifted them up to the Lord*, few are those who truly raise their mind to the Lord Jesus Christ! Perhaps it is better for us to pray with our mind, "May our hearts be raised to the Lord," because both our mind and our heart have a tendency to be drawn downward. Otherwise, we are lying when we say, "We have raised them to the Lord," when in fact our mind is not there at all. Of course, if our heart is indeed

turned toward Heaven, then everything will surely go toward Heaven.

– How does it help to chant with contrition?

– Keep your mind focused on the divine meanings of the hymns and approach them devoutly; don't grasp the divine meanings as literature, but with your heart. Devoutness is one thing, and art – the art of chanting – another. Art without devoutness is ... paint. When the chanter chants devoutly, the chanting overflows from his heart, and he chants with contrition. When one is in a wholesome spiritual state, everything will be all right. This is why one must be well-ordered inside and be able to chant with his heart, with devoutness, in order to actually chant with contrition. If someone has negative, inappropriate thoughts, what kind of chanting can he possibly offer? He cannot possibly chant with the heart. Why does the Sacred Scripture say, *Is any among you cheerful? Let him chant praise.*[4] When Saint John Koukouzelis once chanted, while pasturing the goats, the goats got up and stood upright. This is how people realized that he was indeed Koukouzelis, the chanter of the imperial court. Whatever you do, do it with your heart, and do it for Christ. Put devoutness even into your embroidery, for it will be used with the sacred vessels, and even those you make for the *katzion*.[5] When someone is devout, his spiritual beauty is apparent in everything he

4. Jas 5:13.

5. A large censer used to cense the Church, at certain points in the liturgical services, by the appointed person who wears an embroidered covering draped over his right shoulder. Above the handle of the censer is the cup where the charcoal and the incense are placed, and around the edge of the censer little bells are hanging to make a rhythmic sound during the censing.

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does; it shows in his reading and in his chanting, even in his mistakes.

– In his mistakes?

– Yes, you can see that even the mistakes a devout person happens to make will profess devoutness, a certain kind of modesty.

Outward Piety

One who has great faith and true devoutness is nurtured by something higher, spiritual, which cannot be readily described. But there are those who have an arid outward piety, who say dryly, "Now that I am entering the Church, I must sit carefully, I mustn't move, I must bow my head, and this is how I must cross myself." Others may question their faith, yet stand throughout an all-night vigil.

– Geronda, do they do this because they are restless and searching for something?

– There must be something going on inside. This is all very well, but one must feel something inside; it must not be merely an outward show. It is one thing to take off your hat as you enter the Church out of devoutness, and quite another to remove it to cool your head. Devoutness can be seen by the way we receive the gift of Holy Communion, by the way we receive the *antidoron*,[6] and so on.

– Geronda, can one be annoyed by someone else's expression of devoutness?

– Look, if someone makes the sign of a large cross, but does it simply, humbly, it doesn't annoy. But if it's done

6. The blessed bread given to non-communicants at the end of the Liturgy.

to show off, over and over again, then people will begin to make fun of him. Or if, when passing by a Church, he looks to see if there are other people watching him, or patiently waits for them to gather and then begins to make the sign of the cross and prostrations to be seen, then indeed people are right to make fun of him. You see, a worldly spirit is frowned upon. True devoutness shows. Without true devoutness, what is normally becoming and decent[7] becomes unbecoming and indecent.

"Give Not That Which Is Holy Unto the Dogs"[8]

When people bring you a sick person's clothing to place on the holy Relics to be sanctified, be careful to take only an undershirt and not other underclothing; it is inappropriate and impious. The sun, of course, cannot be polluted, nor is God polluted; but we can become possessed by the evil one through our lack of devoutness.

In the past, when people got sick, they would take a little oil from the vigil oil-lamp, rub it on their bodies and they would get well. Now the vigil lamp is kept only as a formality, just to provide some light, and the oil, when they clean the vessel, is poured into the sink. Once I went to a home, and saw the lady of the house washing the vigil lamp, and I asked her, "Were does the water from the sink go?" "Into the sewage system," she answered. And I had to ask her, "How is it that you take oil from the vigil lamp to bless your child when it is sick, and now you pour the remains of oil into the sewage system in order to

7. Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 14:40; 1 Thess 4:12.
8. Mt 7:6.

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clean the lamp? How can you justify this? How can you expect God's blessing to come to your home?" In today's home there is no place to put a sacred object, even the little piece of paper in which you may have wrapped the *antidoron*.

I remember in our home even the water used to wash the dishes did not go into the sewage system; it was disposed of elsewhere, because even the leftover crumbs were considered sacred, since we prayed before and after the meal to bless everything. All of these customs have disappeared today, and for this reason divine Grace is also missing and people are susceptible to demonic influence.

As much as we can, we must be careful in all things. After Holy Communion or the *antidoron* or Holy Unction, it is good to wipe our hands with some cotton wet with alcohol and to burn the cotton. When we sweep the Sanctuary, what is gathered should be burned in a clean place or thrown into the sea, because some pieces of *antidoron* or even of Holy Communion may have fallen there. Naturally, if the Body and Blood of Holy Communion is dropped on the floor, Christ does not remain there to be stepped upon, but Grace leaves us. Abroad, the Churches don't have separate cisterns for the waters of the *Proskomide*, which go into the drains with the rainwater. "We are forbidden to have separate cisterns for such purposes, because they become a breeding ground for bacteria," they say. While virtually everyone is now filled with bacteria of body and soul, people will still say that bacteria will be formed if a drop of sacred oil is put upon our heads. How then can the blessing of God come upon us? This is where the world's demonism starts

from. Fortunately, there are a few devout women, young and old, and the world is saved.

– Geronda, a lady asked us to paint an Icon of Saint Arsenios to place in her living room.

– Will she have only Icons there? Won't she have other paintings, pictures and so on? Won't they also smoke there? It would be better to put it in another room with the other Icons and go there to pray. I went to a home once where the Icons had been placed below the stairs, even though they had plenty of better places to put them. In another home, the Icons had been placed in front of the waste pipe. And I asked the lady of the house, "How did you ever think of putting the Icons in this spot?" "This is where I am at ease with them," she answered. And it was not even the east side of the house, but the north. How then can the Grace of God come to us? Sacred Scripture says, *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance. But whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.*[9] We imagine that we have something, and whatever little we might have is taken away from us.

Little by little, devoutness is lost altogether, and this is why the evil things we see are occurring. If one is not careful, one can even become possessed by the devil. There was a woman – God grant her forgiveness for she is now gone – who had been possessed, because she poured the holy water down the drain. She had a small amount of holy water in a bottle and she thought, "It must be stale by now; I'll pour it out, and use the bottle for some other need." She poured out the holy water and washed out the

9. Mt 13:12.

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bottle, because a tiny piece of sweet basil had remained in the bottle. After that she became possessed. Grace had abandoned her, for Grace cannot remain with a person who is devoid of any devoutness.

– Geronda, what if someone pours out some Holy Water (*Aghiasmos*) by mistake?

– If the same person had put the Holy Water in a cabinet, and had forgotten about it, and poured it out by mistake, then he bears partial responsibility for the sin. But if another person had placed the Holy Water in the cabinet, and the one who poured it out did not know that it was holy water, then he bears no responsibility.

If a person has no reverence and does not respect all sacred matters, how can divine Grace approach him? Grace will go to those who honour it. "Do not give what is holy to the dogs," says the Sacred Scripture. If there is no spiritual sensitivity, there cannot be any progress.

On the Holy Mountain, someone took pews out of a Chapel and put them in his. Another person took the tiles from the roof of another Chapel and used them for his veranda. When it rained, the water came into the sanctuary and fell on the Holy Altar. I went in once and what did I see? The Chapel had been consecrated, and at the centre of the Holy Altar there was a holy relic, a vertebra. I picked it up and washed it at the holy water cistern. Later, I went and talked to them: "What are you doing? The Chapel is consecrated, and you've removed the roof tiles letting the water fall upon the Holy Altar!" They later went with a roofer and somewhat repaired it.

In another place, boards were removed from the Sanctuary to make a boat dock. A storm came and washed

away the boards and the cement. And people do not understand that all these things are so irreverent.

I remember in Konitsa there was a grandfather who would chase away the children who scratched the wall of the Church; he considered this to be irreverent. And now look at what is happening around us!

Devoutness in All Things

Here, too, we must be careful. A cloth adorned with crosses was spread out on a sofa; it is inappropriate to sit or to step on crosses. Some Jewish merchants mark the bottom of shoes with crosses. Many times crosses are found not only on the outside of shoes, but also on the inside of the heel and the sole. How strange it is to pay money for the shoes and to be stepping on crosses! Long ago, these people had made some baby rattles with *Panaghia* and Christ on one side and Karagiozis[10] on the other side. People will say, "Karagiozis on one side, Christ on the other, what does it matter!" And the poor people would see Christ and *Panaghia* and buy them for their little children. The children dropped the rattle, it was stepped upon, and soiled. And now, people told me that Roman Catholic missionaries somewhere near China are wearing some necklaces which have Christ on the inside and Buddha on the outside. Either place Christ alone on the inside, or confess Christ openly, otherwise the Grace of God does not come. Here in Greece some people in

10. Karagiozis is the main character of Greek shadow-theater – a popular form of entertainment derived from folk tradition. Destitute, barefoot, ugly and hunchbacked, he mocked the poor folks' traits, such as cleverness, cunningness, servility and laziness.

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authority, without thinking, have placed *Panaghia* on a stamp, which is usually thrown away and stepped upon.

– Geronda, can someone be devout in some things and not in others?

– No, if he is truly devout, he will be devout in all things. Once a priest was staying at the Monastery of Stavronikita, and once, during the reading of the Six Psalms,[11] he lowered the pew seat and sat! "Father, they're reading the Six Psalms," I told him. "This way I can enjoy it all the more," he told me. Just think! Years later he came and found me. He told me that he was preparing Icons and giving them away as a blessing. I asked him, "How do you glue the Icons?" He explained, "I put glue on the wood, position the paper Icon on the wood, and, when I have a stack of them, I pile them up and sit on them so they can stick well. Then I take a book and read for a while!" When I heard this, my hair stood on end! I said, "What are you doing? You are sitting on the Icons so they can stick?" "Why not?" he said, "Isn't it proper?"

Do you see where this is going? The bad thing is that this lack of devoutness gets worse; it never stops. Man evolves either for better or for worse. See where that priest started from and where he ended up. "This way I can enjoy the Six Psalms all the more," he said then, and afterward he reached the point of saying, "By sitting on them, the Icons will stick, and I can do some reading." Then he thought it strange what I told him about the Six

11. The selection of Six Psalms (3, 37, 62, 87, 102, 142) from the Book of Psalms, which are read at the beginning of the Orthros as an introduction to this Service. After the end of the first three Psalms which make up the first part, when we say "Glory to the Father..." and three "Hallelujah", we do no small prostrations nor our cross, as the rule requires in other circumstances.

Psalms. And there were other, older Fathers who wer standing at the time. They leaned a little on the pew an did not move at all. It is one thing if someone is ver tired or sick, and his legs are weak and he is sitting fo that reason – Christ will of course not condemn him. Bu it is very different to imagine this to be the right way an to even add the remark, "I enjoy the Psalms more when am sitting." How can you justify this? Spiritual life is no a matter of enjoyment. If you're hurting, sit; Christ is no a tyrant. Abba Isaac says, *If you cannot stand, sit.*[12] H does not say, "If you can, sit!"

– Geronda, why don't we sit during the reading of th Six Psalms?

– Because they symbolize the Judgment. During th reading of the Six Psalms, our mind should be thinkin of the hour of Judgment. The reading takes about six o seven minutes. During the first part, we do not even mak the sign of the cross, because now Christ will come not t be crucified, but will come as Judge.

People Were So Devout in the Pas

– Geronda, why is devoutness so hard to find nowa days?

– Because people have stopped living spiritually. The interpret everything using worldly reasoning and banish divine Grace. In the past people were so devout! I Aitoloakarnania,[13] there were some grandmothers wh

12. See Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies*, Homily 20, p. 103 Homily 51, p. 247; Homily 75, p. 366.

13. A prefecture in central Greece.

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had such simplicity and devoutness that they would bow to the mules of the Holy Monastery of Proussos, whenever they came down from Proussos to provide for the needs of the Monastery. "These are the mules of *Panaghia*!" they would say and bow down with reverence. Now, if they showed such devoutness to the mules of the Monastery of *Panaghia*, imagine what devoutness they showed to *Panaghia* Herself!

– Geronda, was the devoutness of the Pharasiotes instilled in them by Saint Arsenios?

– They had devoutness and the Saint cultivated it further. This is the tradition. Prodromos Kortsinoglou, the elderly chanter for Saint Arsenios, was very devout. He was over eighty years old, and he still walked half an hour to go to the lower part of Konitsa to chant in the Church. "I am a dog of Christ," he would say. During the cold winter, the frozen roads were very dangerous. The waters from the springs would flow downhill and freeze and you had to find a spot to walk and not slip. He defied all obstacles to attend Church and chant. Now that's devoutness!

My parents told me that the Pharasiotes in their ancestral town in Asia Minor had collected money to build a Church in Pharasa. However, later Saint Arsenios wanted to distribute the money to the poor families since they already had a Church. The Saint went to distribute the money to the poor families in the region and they would not take it. They would not take money away from the Church. Then the Saint decided to send the money to the bishop in Caesarea by the town president.[14] The Saint told him, "Take some companion with you for the

14. President of the town of Pharasa was the father of the Elder Paisios.

road." "Your blessing is sufficient," the president replied and went on his way alone. When he arrived, the bishop asked him, "But what did *Hadjiephentis* want you to do with the money?" "To distribute it to the poor families in the area," the president replied. "And why didn't you do as he asked?" "The people would not accept the money because it belongs to the Church," he said. Finally, the bishop insisted that the money go back to Pharasa. When the Pharasiotes were leaving their town with the exchange of the populations, they asked Saint Arsenios to take the money with them in order to build a Church here in Greece. Then Saint Arsenios told them with tears in his eyes, "In Greece you will find many Churches, but not the faith which exists here."

Reverence For Icons

What reverence we must have for the holy Icons! A monk once prepared an Icon of Saint Nicholas to give to someone as a blessing. He wrapped it in a clean piece of paper and placed it in a cabinet until the time came to give it. But without realizing it, he placed it upside down. After a while, a rattling sound could be heard in the room. The monk looked around to see where the sound was coming from. He did not realize at first that it was coming from the cabinet. The rattle continued for some time, "tap, tap, tap" and would not leave him in peace. Finally, when he approached the cabinet and realized the sound was coming from there, he opened it and heard the sound coming from the Icon. "Let me see what is the matter with this Icon," he said to himself and unwrapped

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it. He saw what had happened, stood the Icon upright and immediately the sound stopped.

The devout person will especially venerate the holy Icons. And when we say, "He will venerate the holy Icons" we mean he venerates the person depicted on the Icon. When someone has a picture of his father, his mother, his grandfather or grandmother, his brother, he cannot possibly tear it or step on it. How much more must we venerate the Icons of the Saints. Jehovah's Witnesses have no icons. The honour we show to the Icons they consider to be idolatry. I asked one of them once, "Don't you have photographs in your homes?" "Yes, we do," he said. "Well then, does a mother kiss the photograph of her child, when that child is far away?" "Yes, she does," he said. "Does she kiss the paper of the photograph or her child?" I asked and he replied, "She kisses her child." "Well then, just as she kisses her child when she kisses his photograph, we kiss Christ when we kiss His Icon; we don't kiss the paper or the wood."

– Geronda, even if a plank of wood had been once painted with an icon of Christ, of *Panaghia*, or of a Saint and the colours have faded over time, are we not still to show reverence for it?

– Yes, of course. When someone venerates the holy Icons with devoutness and fervent love, he absorbs the colours from them and the Saints are imprinted on his soul. The Saints are pleased when they are lifted up from the paper or the wood and imprinted in people's hearts. When a Christian devoutly kisses the holy Icons and prays for help from Christ, *Panaghia*, the Saints, he draws into his heart not only the Grace of Christ, of *Panaghia* and of the Saints, but also the whole of Christ, or of *Panaghia*, or of

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a Saint, and places them upon the iconostasis of his own temple. *Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.*[15] You see, every divine service begins and ends with the veneration of the holy Icons. If people could understand this they would feel such joy, they would receive so much power!

– Geronda, in the Supplication Service of the *Panaghia*, why does a verse in the hymns of praise say, *Speechless be the lips of the impious who do not venerate your sacred Icon*?

– When someone is not devout and yet kisses the Icons, are his lips not speechless? And, when the devout kisses the Icons, aren't his lips full of praise? There are some people who do not even touch the Icon when they venerate it. Others touch only their lips to the Icon when they kiss it. Here, like this.[16] Did you hear anything?

– No.

– Well then, "speechless" are the lips. Whereas the devout person kisses the Icon and you can hear the sound of the kiss. In that case, the lips are "eloquent" with praise. It is not a matter of cursing when the verse says "speechless", but rather that those lips are without a sound, while the others are eloquent with sounds. When we look upon the holy Icons, our hearts should be overflowing with love for God and for the Saints, and we should prostrate ourselves to venerate them and kiss them devoutly.

If you could only see a devout elderly Monk, Father Savvas in the Monastery of Philotheou, with what devoutness, with what heart, he would venerate the holy Icon of *Panaghia*, the Sweetly-kissing! In this Icon of

15. 1 Cor 6:19, 3:16.

16. The Elder reverenced an Icon, kissing it without a sound.

Panaghia, which the Fathers always kissed at the same spot, a little bump had formed over the years.

The Icon which is painted with devoutness draws the Grace of God from the devout iconographer, and then transmits eternal consolation to the faithful. The iconographer is depicted, translated into the Icon he makes; and for this reason the iconographer's spiritual state is very important. Father Tychon[17] used to tell me, "My son, when I paint the *Epitaphios* Icon I chant the hymn: *The noble Joseph, after taking down Your sacred body from the Cross, wrapped it in a clean shroud and laid it in a new tomb*. He used to chant as he shed tears and his tears fell upon the Icon. Such an Icon preaches an eternal message to the faithful of the world. The holy Icons preach eternally down through the centuries. One who is suffering will look upon an Icon of Christ or of *Panaghia* and directly receive consolation.

The foundation is devoutness. You see, someone may lean against the wall where an Icon has stood and he receives Grace, while another may own the best Icon, but because he is not devout, receives no benefit. Or one may benefit from a simple wooden cross, while another, who is not devout, may not even benefit from the True Precious Cross itself.

We Offer the Purest to God

Once I was scandalized here in your Church. I saw a candle burning on the Holy Altar that was this short!

17. See Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, Souroti, Thessaloniki 1993, p.15-40.

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Even on my candle stand before the iconostasis, I do not leave such a small candle to burn; I feel it would show contempt.

– Geronda, people say that the candle should be allowed to burn to the end.

– Yes, it should burn to the end, but where? This is important. It is one thing for the candle to burn to the end on the candle stands where the congregation light their candles, and another thing for it to burn to the end on the Holy Altar or the Holy Prothesis. It is inappropriate to leave half a candle burning on the Holy Altar. Also on the great chandelier, the candles should be changed if they become very small, even though they may last through the entire Service. During the Divine Liturgy, use a large candle for the Small and the Great Entrance, for it symbolizes Saint John the Forerunner. In some places, they put the vigil oil lamps out to economize! Don't they understand that God will send them great blessings when they show devoutness for Him? Also, it is inappropriate to use for memorial services the very thin candles that look like candle-fillers. It is a disgrace to give these tiny things to others.

– Geronda, may the nuns burn in their cells as many candles as they want?

– Let them burn the candles, and may the devil burn, too. After all, the whole world is burning. Only be sure the candle you are burning has meaning; and always accompany it with prayer.

It is a great thing to put your trust in God. We eat the sweet fruit and offer God the resin of trees with the censer. We eat the honey and offer God the beeswax, and even to that, we add paraffin. One candle we offer to God

as a token of gratitude for His abundant blessings, and even that is not pure because we mix it with paraffin. Imagine if God expected us to offer to Him the honey! I can only imagine what we would do then! Either a watery broth or a little sugary water is all that we would offer. May God not take us too seriously! We can be thrifty in all things except in the worship of God. To God we must offer the purest and the best we have.

– Geronda, people do not easily understand that burning paraffin candles is a sign that our devoutness is flawed.

– Tell the people, "It is not good for your health to burn paraffin candles in Church." They may think a little about this. And if the Church is small, people will have trouble breathing. It is better to light one small beeswax candle than a huge taper made of paraffin. This is why many get dizzy and faint in Churches. It is unhealthy to burn all that paraffin in such a small Church! And this is not all. People want to use in the vigil lamps oils that are not fit for consumption. What are we coming to! It says in the Old Testament that the oil used in the Temple had to be made from olives gathered from the trees and not from those that had fallen to the ground. Not that God has any need of that oil or of the incense. No, but God is moved, because it is an offering which expresses man's gratitude and love for Him.

At Mount Sinai, I was impressed by the Bedouins, who had nothing to offer. But still, they gather some very small stones that are different from the others, or if they find a few leaves in the cracks of the mountain, they gather them and go up and leave them on the rock which Moses struck with his rod and water gushed out. Or the mothers who are nursing their babies go there to

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drip a few drops of their milk with the thought, "May God grant me milk to nurse my children." You can see the gratitude they have. It is not a small matter. And look at us. Those Bedouins will judge us. They leave on the rock little pieces of wood, a few leaves, some bright little stones... Has God any need of these? No, but God helps because He sees the good heart, the virtuous disposition. This is how their good intentions are expressed.

– Geronda, when we light a candle, do we say that it is for a particular purpose?

– You light the candle; where are you sending it? Aren't you sending it somewhere? With the candle, we're asking God for something. When you light the candle and say, "This is for those who are suffering bodily and spiritually, and for those who have the greatest need," both the living and the dead are included. Do you know how much consolation the dead receive when you light a candle for them? This way we can have spiritual communication with both the living and the dead. In other words, the candle serves as an antenna, bringing us into communication with God, with the sick and with those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, and so on.

– Geronda, why do we burn incense?

– We burn it to praise God. We glorify Him and we are grateful to Him for His abundant benefactions to us and to the entire world. Incense, like the candle, is also an offering. And having offered it to God and to the Saints by censing the holy Icons, we then also cense the living icons of God, the faithful men and women who have gathered in Church.

You must put your heart into it, whether it is an expression of gratitude or a request. With each candle I say,

"My God, with all my heart I ask You to do me a favour." And with the incense I say, "I thank You God with all my heart for all Your gifts. I thank You for forgiving my many sins and the ingratitude of all the people and my own abundant ingratitude."

Cultivate your devoutness and your modesty as much as you can. This will help you receive the Grace of God. For, if someone is devout and spiritually modest and humble too, he can expect to receive divine Grace. If he has no devoutness and no humility, the Grace of God does not come to him. What does the Sacred Scripture say? *But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word.*[18]

18. Isa 66:2.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Το δόσιμο έχει θείο οξυγόνο

Self-Offering Provides Divine Oxygen

People Tend to Forget Those Who Suffer

Geronda, you have said that the more we deprive ourselves of human consolation, the more we receive divine consolation. Is this why prayer is felt more when one is hungry?

– Yes, but a hungry person can also understand the hungry. A satiated person cannot understand the suffering of the hungry. I heard that somewhere people throw away food, and down the street there are people – some Greek-origin Russian refugees from Pontus[1] – who have no food to eat. These poor people live in hot-houses and corrugated iron shacks. Let's say that those who throw away the food do not know of the needy people nearby. Can't they at least ask and find out? They throw the food away! We refuse to give away even things that we no longer need. It is a sin when people hold on to things they no longer need and refuse to give them away to those who

1. A region of NE Asia Minor.

really need them and are unable to buy them. That, for me, is the greatest hell. At the Hour of Judgment Christ will tell us, *For I was hungry and you gave me no food.*[2]

Some people who have everything say, "There are no poor people today." They don't think of others. They don't put themselves in other people's shoes so as not to be disturbed and lose their peace of mind. Then how can they possibly find the poor and the hungry? But if you think of others, you will seek out the poor and find out what they need. There are so many orphans who have no one to show them some human warmth. People tend to forget those who suffer. Their mind is on the wealthy who have everything, and they compare themselves with them instead of those who are suffering. If only they could think, for example, of some Northern Epirotes, who've been imprisoned for twenty years in a tiny cell simply for making the sign of the cross, then perhaps they would see things differently. It is a terrible thing! We cannot even imagine it. Do you know what it means to be in a one-by-one meter cell? The prisoner cannot sit up, lie down, or even stand up. As for a window, there may be a hole in the wall.[3]

– Geronda, that is more like a grave than a prison!

– At least in the grave one is spread out flat. And the tortures that go on in those prisons... There is so much suffering today; the world is making weapons and has abandoned those who suffer. In Africa I saw people eat camel droppings. The people there have bodies that don't look like bodies. They look like frogs. Their chest is like

2. Mt 25:42.
3. It was spoken in May 1990.

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a little basket of bamboo strips. Why am I troubled? We have everything and can't feel the pain of others. And yet we still want to go to Paradise...

When I went to the Holy Monastery of Stomion in 1958, there was in Konitsa a Protestant who was supported financially from America and who had proselytized eighty families. He had also constructed a building where the families gathered. Those poor people had great needs and because of their great poverty they were forced to become Protestants, for they were then helped financially. One day one of them said to me, "Because of my great need, I would even become a Jew." When I heard this, I said to myself, "Something must be done." I gathered a few people who were somewhat better-off and could help and I talked to them. At the time these people were entirely worldly but at least were well disposed. One soul in particular, although entirely worldly then, was great-hearted. When I saw her, I said to myself, "On the outside she looks like a rotten branch, but inside she is good kindling." We decided to collect some money and give it to the poor families. Whatever money was gathered, I told them to go and give it themselves to the poor so that they themselves might be helped spiritually.

This way, even if their heart was hard as stone, it would soften and become a human heart and the gate of Paradise would open for them, too. Soon, all of them changed heart, because they could see the suffering that existed around them and did not have the heart to go out and have fun. They would tell me, "You have disarmed us, how can we go now to entertain ourselves?" They also came close to the Church. Later, I learned that one of them became a chanter. But the eighty families, too,

by the Grace of God, returned to the Orthodox Churcl one after the other. Later, when the American Protestant: came to see the work of the Protestant who had proselyt· ized the families, they took him to court because he nc longer had any followers!

– Geronda, some people will readily ask for help when they are in need, while others say nothing.

– Many are ashamed and do not want to be exposed. These people are in greater need, and any help given to them matters more. I know of two doctors who for some reason became so poor that they did not have money to buy even some aspirin. For someone who has love in him, it's not enough to simply give to anyone who happens to ask for charity; he seeks to find people who have some need in order to support them. My mother always looked to find such cases.

The Criterion of Love

When someone has the wherewithal to give charity, you can't be sure whether he has love or not, for he may not be giving out of love, but just to get rid of certain things. When someone does not have much and yet does offer charity, then his love is evident. Let us suppose that I believe I have love; God, in order to test my love, sends me a poor person. For example, if I have two watches, a good one and a slightly damaged one, and I give the inferior watch to the poor man, this indicates that my love is of secondary quality. If I have real love, I will give the poor man my good watch. However, faulty thinking overtakes us and we say, "Why should I give my good watch to someone who has none? For him even the old

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broken watch will be good enough." But when you give the old watch, then the old self still lives in you; but if you give the new watch, then you are a renewed, a reborn man, according to the Gospel. It is a damnable state when you keep both watches and give neither away.

– Geronda, how can someone get out of that state?

– He should think, "If it were Christ Himself, what would I give? Certainly the better watch." This is how we can see which love is the real one. He will then make a decisive choice and the next time give the better object. At first it may be a little difficult, but, if he keeps on trying like this, he will eventually get to the point of giving both the old and the new in order to help others. He may then not have a watch, but he will have Christ in his heart and will hear the sweet beat of his heart rejoicing with divine joy.

If they take away your coat and you also give away your shirt,[4] then you will be clothed by Christ. If you feel sorry for some unfortunate soul and help him, think, if he were Christ Himself, what sacrifice you would make! This is how we can be put to the test. The person of faith sees Christ in the person next to him. Christ Himself has said, *Whatever you did to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me*.[5] The honour, of course, is given to each person accordingly,[6] but the love is the same for all. In his heart, both the highest-ranking official and the poor man hold the same place; the general and the soldier.

4. Cf. Lk 6:29.
5. Cf. Mt 25:40.
6. Cf. Rom 13:7.

– Geronda, why is it that sometimes the person receiving help behaves badly toward his benefactor?

– The devil goads the person to behave badly so that we may become indignant and lose the benefit of our kindness. It is not his fault; the devil goads him to make us lose everything. When you do a kindness, always feel that you have simply done your duty and be prepared to face temptation so that you may not lose, but gain all of the good that you may have done. Someone, for example, offers charity and has no intention of revealing it. Then temptation comes in to it, and makes others say to him, "You avaricious person, you have done nothing and so on, while so and so has done this and that..." This may force him to say humbly, "Well, I, too, have done something small, a hospital." Or he may become indignant and be forced to say, "Who, me? I, who have done this and that?" Either way, he loses the spiritual benefit. Or the devil may provoke the recipient of charity to tell his benefactor, "You are ungrateful, an exploiter" and so forth, until he finally impatiently responds, "I'm the exploiter? I, who offered you this and that charity, and am your benefactor?" Not stopping there, he'll go on, "What an ungrateful person he is; I didn't even care if he said a *thank you*, but he should have at least acknowledged my kindness." But when one expects an acknowledgment, well then, there goes the spiritual benefit and everything is lost. Whereas if the benefactor holds on to good thoughts and says, "It's better that he's forgotten the kindness I did him." Or, "Perhaps he was upset or tired to speak like that," he excuses the bad behaviour and does not lose the spiritual benefit.

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When we do not expect repayment of any kind for our kindness, then our spiritual reward remains pure. Christ did everything for us and we crucified Him. What is it that we say in our hymns, *Instead of the manna I offered them, they gave me gall to drink.*[7] Let us always try to do good without expecting anything in return.

He Who Gives Receives Divine Joy

Two joys exist for man. One is the joy of receiving and the other is the joy of giving. The special joy one feels when giving cannot be compared with the joy one feels when receiving. If man is to understand whether or not he is making spiritual progress, he must first look within himself to see if he rejoices when he gives and not when he receives; if he's upset when receiving and joyful when giving. Then again, if he's working properly spiritually, he will rarely ever remember the good he has done, but will never forget even the smallest good done to him. He can never ignore the smallest benefaction of others. He may have given an entire vineyard to someone and forgotten about it. But if the other person gives him just one bunch of grapes from that same vineyard, he will never forget it. Or he may have given someone many valuable carved wooden Icons and forgotten about it. But if the receiver later reciprocates by giving him a small Icon made of plastic, he is moved by the gesture, even though it is of such insignificant value, and, out of gratitude, he's already thinking how to repay the favour.

7. From the Idiomelon hymn of the 12th Antiphon in the Orthros Service of Great and Holy Friday.

He could give away even an entire Chapel along with the plot of land and still put it out of his mind. In other words, the correct spiritual approach is to forget the good you do to others and to remember the good others do to you. When someone reaches this state of spiritual being, then he is indeed human, a man of God.

But, on the other hand, if someone constantly forgets the good done to him by others and only remembers the good he has done to others, this work is contrary to what Christ seeks from us. But even if one thinks, "You gave me so much and I gave you that much...," this, too, is an unacceptable mentality, grocer-like. I try to give to the person who has the greatest need. I don't reckon things according to a bargaining mentality: he gave me these books and now I owe him the same amount which I must pay in order to be even. Or, if others don't give to me, I won't give them anything either. This too is nothing more than a human form of justice.

He who receives experiences human joy. But he who gives experiences divine joy. Divine joy comes to us by giving. Someone, for example, gives me a book. He now rejoices spiritually, divinely, and I, who receive the book, rejoice humanly. When I, too, give the book, I too will rejoice divinely, while the other person who receives it will rejoice humanly. But if he, too, goes on to give it, then he, too, will rejoice divinely, and so on. Do you see how with one thing alone many people can rejoice both humanly and divinely?

One must learn to rejoice by giving. When he rejoices by giving, he is properly placed and is networking with Christ; he has divine Grace. When he gives or offers something, the joy he feels provides him with di-

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vine oxygen. When someone rejoices when he receives or when others are sacrificing themselves for him, this type of joy is full of an asphyxiating stench. The people who offer themselves unconditionally, without any consideration for themselves, will be the ones who will judge us in the future. What wonderful joy these people experience! These are the people Jesus Christ protects. But most people, unfortunately, are only happy when they receive things, so they deprive themselves of any divine joy and remain tormented. Christ is moved when we love our neighbour more than ourselves, and He fills us with divine gladness. You see, He did not restrict Himself to *You shall love your neighbour as yourself*,[8] but went on to sacrifice Himself for mankind.

The Greedy Gather For Others to Find

– Geronda, there are two little brothers; the younger one gives, but the older one doesn't.

– The parents must teach the older child how sweet it is to give. If the older boy works on this, he'll become better and will have an even greater reward than the younger one who's giving by nature.

– Geronda, how can someone get rid of having a closed heart, of his difficulty in giving?

– Why, are you stingy? I'll throw you out! Even with your obedience, for example, if you are in charge of hospitality, go receive a general blessing to be able to give. Don't you see how God Himself is so generous in giving His blessings to all? If someone does not become used

8. Lev 19:18; Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27.

to giving, he becomes used to stinginess and then he has difficulty in giving.

The greedy person becomes a kind of "piggy bank", gathering for others to find. But he loses the joy of giving and of divine reward. Once I told a rich man, "Why do you hoard your money? You have no obligations. What will you do with the money?" "When I die it will all remain here," he told me. But I told him, "I give you a blessing to take it all up there!" "It will all remain here," he said again. "Let others take it when I am dead." "Of course the money will all stay here," I said to him, "but the point is for you to give it away with your own hands while you are still alive." There is no more foolish person than the greedy one, who constantly amasses money and lives in deprivation, only to finally buy his way into hell with his hoarded money. He has lost it all because he doesn't give, and loses himself with material things, and then he loses Jesus Christ.

The miserly person becomes the laughing stock of others. There once was a rich landowner; he owned many fields in the country and apartments in Athens, but was very stingy. Once he prepared a large pot of bean soup for his workers in the fields, but it was very watery. In the past, field labourers worked from sunrise to sunset. At noon when they stopped working to rest a little, the rich man poured the soup into a large pan, and the workers gathered around to have lunch. Sometimes they caught a bean in their spoon and sometimes only some broth! One of the workers, who was a teaser, put down his spoon, stepped to the side, removed his shoes and socks, and pretended to climb into the soup pan. "Hey, what are you doing?" the others told him. "I was thinking of climbing

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into the pan to try and catch a bean!" he told them with a smile. That's how stingy that landowner was. For this reason, it is a thousand times better for one to be wasteful than miserly.

– Stinginess is an illness, Geronda.

– A very grave illness. If stinginess takes hold of a person, there is no greater illness. It is good to be thrifty, but one must be careful not to be gradually overcome by the spirit of stinginess.

– Geronda, some people are so stingy, they'll even deprive themselves of food.

– Only food? There was a rich merchant with a large variety store, who used to slice flat matches into three parts so he wouldn't waste them! A very rich woman had a sulphur candle; by maintaining burning coals, she used the sulphur candle to light the fire so that she would not have to use a match. And she had houses, fields and much property. I am not saying that people should be wasteful, but at least an extravagant person will more readily give you something if you ask for it. If someone is mean, he will be too stingy to give it up. Once there were two housewives in the neighbourhood discussing salads and vinegars, and one of them said, "I have very good vinegar." One day the other poor woman needed some vinegar and went to ask her neighbour for some. "Look here," the other said, "if I were to be giving it away, I would not have now this vinegar of seven years!" It is good to be thrifty but also to share whatever we may have with those in need. Being thrifty does not mean being miserly. My father didn't hold on to any money. In Pharasa, there was no hotel, but our home was like the town hotel. Whoever came to town would go to the president's house to stay.

There he would be given food, someone would wash his feet, he'd be given clean socks to wear.

Now I see that even in some shrines, they have storage rooms filled with donated vigil lamps, and they won't say, "We have plenty, don't give us any more." The ones they have certainly cannot be used or sold, and still they don't give them away. When someone begins to gather stuff, he becomes so tied up with his possessions that he is unable to give them away. But if someone stops gathering stuff and starts giving them away, then his heart will gather itself around Christ without even realizing it. It is not right for a widow not to have money to buy a yard of material to clothe her children, while I'm hoarding my money and my goods! How can I tolerate this? In my *Kalyvi* I do not have dishes nor pot and pans; I have some little tin cans. I prefer to give away five hundred drachmas to some student to help him go from one monastery to the next than to buy something for myself. If you do not gather, you have a blessing from God. When you give a blessing, you also receive a blessing. One blessing leads to another.

Good Will Is Everything

– Geronda, what about when someone asks for help and I have nothing to give?

– When I wish to give charity and I have nothing to give, then I do charity with "blood". Someone who has wealth and gives material help, experiences some joy, while another who has nothing to give suffers constantly and is humbled, saying, "I have not given any alms." Good will is everything. A rich man has the ability to give

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and does not give. A poor man wants to give, but does not give because he doesn't have anything to give. The one case is different from the other. If a rich man gives, he will experience a certain degree of joy. The poor man suffers, he wants to give some alms, but has nothing to give and so suffers inside, whereas if he had something to give, he would give it and not suffer. Good will shows in our actions. If someone asks alms from a poor person, and this poor person, even though deprived, offers something – regardless of whether the other person goes out and drinks ouzo with the money given –, then the poor man who gave will have spiritual joy, and God will guide someone else to provide him with material help.

Do you know what great injustice is done sometimes? One person gives all he has in order to help, and the recipient rationalizes the gesture to his liking.

– Geronda, what do you mean?

– Suppose that someone has just five thousand drachmas in his pocket. On his way, he meets a beggar and places all the drachmas in the beggar's hand and leaves. The beggar then sees that he has just received five thousand drachmas and is very happy. At that same time, another very rich person passes by and seeing that the other one gave five thousand drachmas to the beggar, he reasons to himself, "For him to be giving five thousand drachmas at a time, one can only wonder how much money he must have! Certainly he must have millions!" So the very rich man gives five hundred drachmas to the beggar and eases his conscience with the thought that he has done his duty. In fact, the first man only had the five thousand drachmas, and, seeing the beggar, his heart was moved by compassion to give him all his money. If the

rich man had also worked spiritually, he would have had the good thought to reason accordingly, "Oh my goodness, he gave the beggar everything he had!" Or maybe he would have said, "He had ten thousand and gave the five thousand drachmas to the beggar." But how can he have any good thoughts about this matter when he does not work at all in a spiritual manner? He simply reasons and says, "For him to be throwing his money away like that, he must be raking it in."

Some people again, while giving five hundred or even a thousand drachmas to a poor person, will start bargaining over five or ten drachmas with the poor labourer who works for him. I can't understand this. You give five hundred or even a thousand drachmas to a stranger, and the person you have beside you, who helps you, you allow to go hungry? This is the person you are obligated to love and help first. But it seems the charity offered by such people is only done to earn praise from others. They will even take someone to court over a thousand drachmas simply because they are thinking in a worldly way and do not wish to be taken for a dupe.

A devout woman related an incident to me.[9] She wanted to buy a load of firewood from an old lady who had travelled three hours to bring it from the forest to town. In fact, that particular time it had taken her three and a half hours, because she had to circle around the lookout post to avoid the Forest Patrol. "How much is the wood?" the woman asked. "Fifteen drachmas," the old lady replied. "No, it's too much; I'll give you eleven drachmas for it." She then went on to tell me, "I

9. In 1958.

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bargained with her like this so that people will not take us spiritual people for fools." After that I gave her a piece of my mind, a "thorough dressing down". That poor old lady had two animals and had spent two days gathering the wood in order to make twenty-two drachmas. Instead of offering an extra twenty drachmas for the wood, the greedy woman tried to bargain the price down for just a few drachmas.

Almsgiving Greatly Helps the Departed

Wealth can be very destructive for man when it is not distributed to the poor for the benefit of our soul and for the souls of our departed. Giving alms to people who are suffering, widows, orphans and so on, is also very helpful for the repose of the souls of those who have passed away. For when we give alms on behalf of someone who has died, the recipients will say, "May God forgive him; may his relics be sanctified." If someone happens to be sick, unable to work and in debt, and at this difficult time you offer him help and say, "Take this for the sake of the soul of so and so", he, too, will say, "May God forgive him; may his relics be sanctified!" They say a heartfelt prayer, and it is this that helps a lot those who have fallen asleep.

– If a woman's husband dies without having received Holy Communion, without having made his final Confession, or if her child was killed in an accident, what else can she do to help their souls?

– She should try and improve herself as much as possible. This will naturally help her personally, but it will also help her departed husband, for since they have been

inseparably crowned as husband and wife, he, too, has a share in his wife's spiritual improvement. This, of course, is most important of all, that she improve her spiritual life. Otherwise, she may do some charitable work and still maintain her old bad habits. She may say, "I have done my duty; what else do you want me to do?" So, she remains her same old self and may even become worse.

"Giving Alms in Secret"[10]

– Geronda, some people consider it to be Pharisaism when someone goes to Church but is devoid of love and sacrifice.

– But how do they know this? Are they certain of this?

– That is how they see it.

– What did Christ say? Did He say you should judge?[11] Somebody may not give to a gypsy because he intends to help some other sick person who is in great need. The gypsy will receive something from another passer-by, but the sick person may not. How then can they jump to conclusions without knowing? Pharisaism is the practice of some people who do their good works in the open so that other people can praise them.

I remember when I was at the idiorhythmic Monastery[12] in 1957, they provided a certain 'blessing' (a kind of gratuity), depending on the difficulty of each obedience which each monk had undertaken. Because in those days there were shortages of manpower in the monas-

10. Mt 6:4.

11. Cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37; Jn 7:24.

12. A Monastery where the monks live together without a common abbot, but who follow an individual program in their spiritual and communal life.

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teries, there were some Fathers who had the strength to assume several obediences, for which they received additional blessings but would then give them away. There was a monk who was called "*Spangos*" (Stingy), because he was tight and was not known to give. When he died, many poor people gathered at his funeral from Chalkidiki, *Megali Panaghia*, Palaiochori, Neochori, and they were mourning him. These people had oxen to transport their lumber, which then was transported by oxen – unlike today when we use big three-axle trucks. Now, what had that monk done? He had saved all the money provided to him for the obediences he had undertaken, and whenever he found a family who only had one ox or whose ox had died, he would give them the money to buy one. It was a big thing then to be able to buy an ox; they cost about five thousand drachmas, which was a lot in those days. The other Fathers would openly give five drachmas to some poor person, ten to another, even twenty drachmas to still another. But this monk did everything in secret, and no one knew what he was doing. He saved the money and gave it away in large sums to the needy families. Everybody called him "Stingy" because they thought he was tight with his money. Finally, when he died, the poor people who he had helped came to his funeral to mourn him, saying, "He saved us, he saved us..." In those days if someone had an ox he could transport lumber and provide for his family. The Fathers were amazed by their fellow monk who did his charity in secret. That's why I say, how can you possibly know what is going on in the heart and mind of other people?

– Geronda, what is wrong when someone gives alms but feels empty inside?

– He should reflect whether he is acting out of a need to be liked by others. When the motives for almsgiving are pure, then we feel joy. Do you know what they did in some town once? This was told to me by a devout attorney I knew. Christmas was approaching and a few Christians decided to gather various things, bundle them into packages and take them to the public square to distribute them to the poor – it was after the German Occupation when people were in dire need. The attorney advised them, "Since we know who the poor families are, it'd be better if we distributed the packages quietly to each family directly." "No," they said, "we must distribute the packages in the public square for the glory of God, so people can see that we care for the poor." "But this is not right," he told them again. "Where is it written that charity should be given like this?" The group wanted their way ... *for the glory of God*. The devout attorney could not change their minds, and left them to it. They gathered the packages in the town's main square and announced that the packages would be distributed there. Certain greedy, rough and uncouth characters came quickly and gathered up the packages for themselves, even though they had no need, while the poor remained empty-handed. When the donors tried to intervene, they were handed roughly by the shady characters *for the glory of God*! You see how the spiritual laws work? A secular person can be proud and publicly announce his plans, but how can this ever be justified for spiritual people?

– Geronda, are there people who do not believe, but who are still kind and do charitable work?

– When a worldly person gives out of a pure disposition and not out of a need to be liked by others, then God will

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not ignore him, but will find a way to speak to his heart. Someone I know, who lived in Switzerland, told me of the following incident: A rich atheist woman was so kind and compassionate that she distributed all of her property to the poor and suffering, and ended up becoming very poor herself. Then the people who she had helped saw to it that she was placed in the best nursing home. In spite of all her charity, she remained an atheist. When people tried to speak to her about Christ, she refused to discuss the matter. She insisted that Christ was nothing more than a good man, a social worker, and other similar theories. Perhaps even the Christians she happened to meet or know did not help her to be moved by their life. My friend asked me to pray for the soul of that woman. In any case, my friend also prayed fervently for that woman to find her faith in God. After a considerable time had passed, my friend informed me what had finally happened: "One day, when I went to visit her in the nursing home, I found her completely changed. 'I believe! I believe!' she cried out joyfully." Some event had occurred in her life that had changed her. Later she asked to be baptized.

"In So Doing Thou Shalt Heap Coals of Fire Upon His Head"[13]

– Geronda, when someone is not needy but pretends to be, should we help him?

– Christ said, *We should give to him who begs from us without examining.*[14] Even if someone who begs from you

13. Rom 12:20.
14. Cf. Mt 5:42; Lk 6:30.

is not in need, you should still give to him. Be happy in giving to him. God Himself *maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*,[15] so why should we not help our neighbour? Are we worthy of all the gifts granted to us by God? God *does not deal with us according to our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities*.[16] Is some poor person asking you for help? Even if you doubt his situation, you should still help him discreetly so that you are not tempted by negative thoughts. Do you know what Abba Isaac says? *If someone on horseback should stretch out his hand and ask alms of you, do not refuse him, for at that moment he is certainly in need.*[17] You never know what state he may be in. You should believe what the other person tells you and give as you are asked.

If we have, for example, only one thousand drachmas and we give them to a poor person and are troubled for not having more to give, then in addition to the blessing (the money given), we also place Christ and a good restlessness into his conscience. This action of ours will trouble him, because he will constantly be thinking about the merciful person who, together with the one thousand drachmas, also gave him his compassionate heart. This may force him to return anonymously the money exacted or even more. Something similar has happened to me.

Once when I was in Thessaloniki a woman stopped me – she appeared to be a gypsy – and asked for money for her children, because her husband was sick. I only

15. Mt 5:45.
16. Ps 103:10 (Ps 102:10 LXX).
17. See Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies*, Homily 4, p. 37.

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had a five-hundred drachma note, and I gave it to her. "Please forgive me," I told her, "but I do not have any more to give you. If you like, take my address and write to me how your husband is doing, and I will try to send you some more money from the Holy Mountain." After a short time I received a letter containing five hundred drachmas and the following note, "Thank you for your kindness; I am returning the money you gave me."

When someone gives alms with a truly compassionate heart, the beggar is touched by the authentic love, by Christ, and will himself begin to give rather than to gather. But even if the beggar is very hard-hearted and continues to gather, he himself will not enjoy what he has gathered, for God will ensure the money finds its rightful place, and the beggar will be left with only the weariness and the trouble of the collection (let us call it that) which he took for others.

– Geronda, how much then should someone give?

– Someone should give as much as will not trouble his conscience. Discernment is important. He should not give one hundred and then be sorry that he did not give fifty. Much attention is needed when someone has love with a lot of enthusiasm. It is then good to be a little conservative with his love and enthusiasm, so that he will not regret having given too much to an unfortunate person, when less could have been given, and thus be left empty-handed himself. Gradually he can acquire experience and give according to the self-renunciation he has.

– Geronda, if someone asks for unreasonable things, should we give in?

– In that case, one needs discernment and even more discernment. If someone asks you for things just to have

and admire them, let him have them. You see, Jesu Christ did not say to Judas, "What kind of an Apostl are you? Get rid of your avarice!" Instead, He made hin treasurer.[18] But if, for example, someone asks you to giv him a tin of marmalade, which you have, and you know that he has a whole case of it when another person ha none and needs some, then tell the person who has and i asking for more, "Brother, if you like, why don't you alsc give a little to so and so who has none." If there is no one who is in need, then give it without telling him anything, since he has asked you for it. Perhaps this offering, if there is a chord of sensitivity in the recipient, will move him to correct himself.

In these cases we apply what Saint Paul said, *When your enemy harms you and you in turn do him good, you place burning coals upon his head.*[19] This does not mean that you actually burn him, but, when you do good to him, then the love which is Christ begins to work in him, and divine Grace is activated. Then the man can be transformed, because his conscience bothers him, that is, he is burnt by his conscience. But it is not right to do good for the purpose of censuring another and forcing him to be prudent; for this weakens the good done. Good should be done with love. When you avenge the wrong with kindness and goodness, then the person can be changed in the good sense and be corrected.

In Konitsa, there was a drunkard who had a family, and I used to give him something. Some people had learned that I was helping him, because he himself

18. Cf. Jn 12:6.
19. Cf. Rom 12:20; Pr 25:21-22.

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would tell them, and they told me, "Don't give to him; he drinks." But he would tell me, "Give me something for my children," and when giving I would say to him, "Take this for your children." I knew that he drank, but I also knew that this word would also help a little. He would drink but he would also think of his children a little. If I had not given him anything, he would have tormented his wife and taken the money she earned by working as a cleaning lady to drink and cause even greater suffering to his children. But when I told him, "Take this for your children," he did remember his children a little. You see? I felt pain for him and his family, and this was obvious to him and was active in his inner being. Many have been helped in this manner. Some, because their conscience troubled them, would send the money back.

By reasoning we do not allow Christ to do His work. It is time to learn the true Gospel, to be truly Evangelical persons, not Protestants!

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